

CENTER BEARING SEAL ASSEMBLY**BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION**

- [1] The present invention relates to a seal assembly, and more particularly to a seal assembly for a self-aligning center bearing of a multi-shaft driveline.
- [2] Vehicle drivelines typically include a driveshaft that extends a relatively long distance along the vehicle. The shaft is supported at spaced locations. Typically, a bearing supports the shaft and is received within a resilient bearing cushion. The bearing cushion is supported within a support bracket that is fixed to the under side of a vehicle through a hanger bracket.
- [3] Some bearing assemblies include a bearing that is self-aligning within the support bracket. Exterior shields protect the ball bearings within the center bearing. An annulus of space formed between the shields and the ball bearings is packed with grease to provide an additional barrier against environmental contaminants.
- [4] In some instances, grease may be excreted from the center bearing assembly due to the self-aligning feature. Over time, the loss of grease may disadvantageously affect bearing performance.
- [5] Accordingly, it is desirable to provide a seal assembly which accommodates a self-aligning center bearing without loss of grease.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

- [6] The seal assembly according to the present invention provides a shield that is mounted to an outer race on each side of a self-centering bearing and a resilient seal that is mounted to an inner race on each side of the bearing. The shield forms an annulus volume adjacent the outer race in which grease is packed. The seals are V-shaped and include a wiper that rides upon a face of the shield to isolate and retain the grease.
- [7] Another seal assembly includes a shield with a resilient seal mounted therein. The seal include a wiper that rides upon a face of the inner race to isolate the grease from contaminants.
- [8] The present invention therefore provides a seal assembly that accommodates a self-aligning center bearing without loss of grease.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

- [9] The various features and advantages of this invention will become apparent to those skilled in the art from the following detailed description of the currently preferred embodiment. The drawings that accompany the detailed description can be briefly described as follows:
- [10] Figure 1 is a perspective view showing a shaft supported within a self centering bearing assembly according to the present invention;
- [11] Figure 2 is a sectional view of a self centering bearing seal assembly;
- [12] Figure 3 is a sectional view of another self centering bearing seal assembly; and
- [13] Figure 4 is an exploded sectional view of a resilient seal of the seal assembly of Figure 3.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

- [14] Figure 1 illustrates a general perspective view of a self-aligning center bearing system 20. The system includes a support bracket 22 fixed to a vehicle (illustrated schematically at 23) through fasteners 25. The bracket 22 retains a bearing cushion 24. A driveshaft 26 is supported within a bearing 28 for rotation about an axis R. The bearing 28 is mounted within the bearing cushion 24 such that angular movement of the driveshaft 26 off axis R is accommodated thereby. A seal assembly 30 is mounted over each side of the bearing 28 to protect the bearing located therein from environmental contaminants.
- [15] For further understanding of other aspects of a self-aligning bearing and associated components thereof, attention is directed to United States Patent No. 6,379,048 which is assigned to the assignee of the instant invention and which is hereby incorporated herein in its entirety.
- [16] Referring to Figure 2, the bearing 28 includes an inner race 32, an outer race 34 and a multiple of ball bearings 36 (only one shown) therebetween. The seal assembly 30 includes a shield 38 which is mounted to the outer race 34 on each side of the bearing 28 and a resilient seal 40 which is mounted to the inner race 32 on each side of the bearing.

- [17] The shield 38 preferably includes a first diameter 39 and a second diameter 41. The first diameter 39 is mounted to the outer race 34 of the bearing 28. The shield 38 is preferably a stamping which is pressed onto the outer diameter of the bearing 28.
- [18] The shield 38 forms an annulus volume adjacent the outer race 34 in which grease G is packed. The resilient seals 40 are elastomeric elements which are mounted to, and rotate with, the inner race 32. The seals 40 are mounted through a friction fit to the inner race 32. Preferably, the seals 40 are V-shaped and include a wiper 42 which rides upon a face 44 of the shield 38. The face 44 is generally perpendicular to the axis R and parallel to the face of bearing 28. The wiper 42 is preferably located at an angle A relative a shoulder 46 formed in the inner race 32. It should be understood that other seal geometries will also benefit from the present invention.
- [19] In operation the seals 40 minimize leakage of the grease G. The seals 40 not only minimize leakage of the grease G, but also provide a barrier to environmental contamination.
- [20] Referring to Figure 3, another seal assembly 48 is illustrated. The seal assembly 48 includes a shield 50 with a resilient seal 52 mounted therein. That is, the seal 52 is mounted to the shield 50 rather than the inner race (Figure 4).
- [21] Referring to Figure 4, the shield 50 preferably includes a first diameter 60, a second diameter 62 and a third diameter 64. The first diameter 60 is mounted to the outer race 34 of the bearing 28. The third diameter 64 retains the seal 52. The seal 52 is preferably bonded into the third diameter 64, however other attachments will also benefit from the present invention.
- [22] The seal 52 include a wiper 54 which rides upon a face 56 of the inner race 32 to again isolate the grease G from contaminants and the like. The seal 52 preferably includes an internal stiffener 58 to increase support of the seal 52.
- [23] The foregoing description is exemplary rather than defined by the limitations within. Many modifications and variations of the present invention are possible in light of the above teachings. The preferred embodiments of this invention have been disclosed, however, one of ordinary skill in the art would recognize that certain modifications would come within the scope of this invention. It is, therefore, to be understood that within the scope of the appended claims, the invention may be practiced otherwise than as specifically described.

For that reason the following claims should be studied to determine the true scope and content of this invention.